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## Artificial Intelligence and Global Governance

Monique Cuillerier

New and potential applications of artificial intelligence are often discussed in the media, sometimes as dystopian warnings and other times as indications of a hopeful, exciting future. And the uses of artificial intelligence have the potential to be either.

Before we begin to discuss the global governance implications of artificial intelligence, it would be best to define what we are talking about when we use the term "artificial intelligence."

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is often discussed, particularly in the mainstream media in a way that does not fully explain its meaning.

At its most basic level, AI refers to intelligence demonstrated by machines (as opposed to the 'natural' intelligence of humans). AI is generally used to describe machines or computers that engage in learning or problem solving (although technically it encompasses a broader understanding of intelligence).

Common examples of AI already in widespread use are voice-activated assistants like Siri (from Apple) and Alexa (from Amazon) and so-called 'smart home' devices that include doorbells, cameras, thermostats and appliances (such as the Google Nest brand), but it also includes machine learning algorithms, like Gmail's spam filter and smart email categorization or Netflix's algorithm that determines 'what else you might like.'

The UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies, which has a broader reach than merely AI, is based on five principles: protecting and promoting global values, fostering inclusion and transparency, working in partnership, building on existing capabilities and mandates, and being humble and continuing to learn.

The strategy also includes four commitments: deepening the UN's internal capacities and exposure to new technologies; increasing understanding, advocacy, and dialogue;

supporting dialogue on normative and cooperation frameworks; and enhancing UN system support to government capacity development. These commitments are intended to direct technological advances at the common good, include those who are affected by them, and strengthen the capacity of Member States to engage in necessary policy decisions.

This broader discussion of AI has two elements. There is the oversight and management of AI and big data (extremely large data sets) from within the multilateral system. This speaks to who will control these new technological advances and the ethical implications that stem from them. In the article, “Artificial Intelligence and Global Governance: A Thought Leadership and Engagement Platform,” Eleonore Pauwels and James Cockayne write that “We are in the middle of a technological upheaval that will transform the way our multilateral system operates and exerts influence. AI may concentrate power over information in the hands of a few, or it may empower the many. Either way, the resulting power distribution will affect trust — trust in national institutions, trust among states, trust in the rules-based global order.”

This moment of change requires a broad discussion of how these changes will manifest. The Artificial Intelligence and Global Governance platform, a project of the United Nations University's Centre for Policy Research, provides space in which the various interested parties can engage in this discussion.

Amongst the areas that the platform looks to illuminate are considerations of this intersection of AI and the geopolitical order and “the governance of AI, considering how AI’s risks and unintended consequences are minimized and its social benefits are maximized through governance frameworks.”

But additionally, there is also the question of how AI might be used to improve the multilateral structure in general and, more specifically, particular agencies and programs and how the ethical and other implications of AI will manifest in predictable and unpredictable ways.

An article from September 2019, “How Should UN Agencies Respond to AI and Big Data?” describes the three forces shaping the UN's approach to AI and big data: “the broad mission of the UN and the specific mission of each UN agency; the rapid emergence of new technologies; and the political narratives that frame AI and big data.” The article briefly looks at how these forces interact and how UN agencies can use this understanding, using UNAIDS as a specific example.

For example, a testing device that connects to a smartphone could be a useful tool in UNAIDS’ goal of responding effectively to HIV, but it also raises issues around informed consent, privacy, and data storage.

Now is the time to have the inevitably challenging but necessary discussions on how the various forms of AI will be allowed to develop and influence our shared global space, physical and virtual.

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## References

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